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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (11/16): The Palestinian Authority considers declaring an independent state at the UN Security Council

Main Stories:

Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida lead with news on Palestinian officials reiterating that they will pursue a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state at the UN Security Council. The three dailies report on Israel's reaction to this announcement, reporting that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that "Israel too can take on unilateral actions" implying that Israel may reoccupy the West Bank areas that are under the Palestinian Authority if such a move is made. Al-Quds reports on Hamas criticizing the Palestinian Authority's (PA) plan to resort to the UN Security Council for the declaration of the Palestinian state.

The dailies quote US Senator Joseph Lieberman reaffirming America's commitment to the two-state solution, applauding "the positive role played by the Palestinian Authority and its efforts to build state institutions" while visiting the West Bank on Sunday with a Congressional delegation.

Al-Quds runs a lead photo of former President Clinton visiting Al-Aqsa mosque yesterday. The report notes that Clinton urged Israel to give President Obama a chance and stop dealing with him as an "enemy." Clinton noted that it is possible to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during Obama's era.

Al-Ayyam leads with the Head of the Palestinian National Council Salim Az Zanon noting that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Committee will convene on December 15 to discuss the constitutional vacuum that may occur by not holding the elections in January 2010. Fatah leader Mohammad Dahlan is quoted as saying that the Central Committee will extend President Abbas' term if the elections are not held on time.

The dailies report that the Jerusalem municipality distributed demolition orders for two houses in the Old City.

News on Egypt inviting the Palestinian factions to visit Cairo to pursue the national dialogue next week is reported in all three dailies.

Weekend stories:

Sunday, November 15:

The three dailies lead with front page stories on the Palestinian people celebrating the 21st anniversary of the declaration of independence. On this occasion, President Abbas called upon the international community to intensify their efforts to enable the Palestinian people to end the occupation and achieve their rights and national objectives. President Abbas added that without realizing these rights on the basis of justice and fairness, the entire region will not enjoy stability or prosperity. President Abbas also stressed that national unity is the primary way to guarantee success, according to coverage.

Al-Quds and Al-Ayyam report on Hamas accusing Israel of fabricating information to lay the groundwork for a new military attack against the Gaza Strip. Fawzi Barhoum, the spokesperson for Hamas in the Gaza Strip, said in a statement to the press that Israel's claims that Hamas conducted a second attempt to launch a long-range Iranian

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missile indicate Israel's intentions to escalate its aggression against the strip. Barhoum called upon Arab and Muslim countries to cut their ties and relations with Israel, adding "these claims are part of the Israeli lies to justify a new aggression against Gaza."

Saturday, November 14:

The three dailies run front page stories on statements made by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns in an interview with the Washington Post reaffirming the US commitment to the two-state solution. Coverage notes that Burns added that the US considers the Israeli offer to restrain settlement activities as a potentially important step, but it falls short of fulfilling their Road Map obligations. Burns also stressed that US pressure on Israel and the Palestinians are necessary for success.

The dailies report that the US is now open to a conference on the peace process in Moscow. According to unnamed French sources, the US believes that holding a conference in Moscow coupled with the postponement of the Palestinian elections will allow President Abbas the chance to continue his duties until the elections are held.

Al-Ayyam runs a front page story on Saeb Erekat, head of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, saying that the Palestinian leadership is currently working on getting wide support for the idea of going to the UN Security Council to gain international recognition for the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Erekat noted that the decision is "a huge accomplishment with wide and unprecedented Arab consensus supporting this idea." Erekat told Al-Ayyam that he discussed the idea several times with the Americans and the Europeans, while President Abbas raised the idea with the UN Secretary General and Russian officials, both receiving positive reactions. Erekat added that President Abbas will target Latin American countries next week in addition to on-going discussions with European countries.

The three dailies run front page stories on reports in the Jerusalem Post on Friday that settlement activities in East Jerusalem have not stopped despite claims by the Israeli Minister of Housing that the Israeli authorities have not authorized any construction project in the West Bank or East Jerusalem since Netanyahu came into office. According to reports, an Israeli NGO that works for equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem said that "there are more than 20 new projects in East Jerusalem that await the municipality's

approval" and that "it is expected that almost all these projects will be approved. The only remaining question is about the timing."

The three dailies run front page stories on Israeli Army Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi threatening to launch a military operation against the Gaza Strip if rockets continue to be launched from the territory. Ashkenazi added that Hamas suspended its rocket attacks against Israel after the January war and is restraining the other Palestinian factions from doing so. According to reports, the rare Israeli admission about Hamas actions to restrain the launching of rockets comes at a time when both sides continue their indirect negotiations on the prisoners' exchange deal through Egyptian and German mediators.

BLOCK QUOTES:

Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title "More

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Time Means Encouraging Israel" (11/16): "The recent statements by US officials that the US doesn't want to push for Palestinian-Israeli negotiations for the sake of negotiations, and that they prefer to wait until the two parties are ready for such talks, proves that the US policy is wrong. Waiting any longer will grant Israel more time to construct settlements and commit more violations ... When the US and the international community have the courage to say "enough" of the occupation and stop the double standards when dealing with Israel, only then will the US commitment to peace have a meaning."

RUBINSTEIN